

ELIZABETH HUNTER MURDOCK

A PIONEER OF 1852

By Ida M. Kirkham

On the 17th of April, 1839, in Clackmannan-Shire Scotland, a daughter was born to Robert and Agnes Hunter. She was named Elizabeth. Her parents differed in their religious views. The mother being a Methodist with two brothers, who were ministers, could not be persuaded by her husband to join the Catholic Church, of which he was a member. About this time two Mormon elders, William Gibson and John Sharp appeared in their midst with a new gospel. Agnes Hunter went to hear the new message. As soon as she heard it, she knew in her heart that the true gospel was being preached and she was converted at once. Her brothers hated the Mormons and told her if she joined their church, their family would be disgraced forever and that she would never be one of them again. Because of their strong attitude against the Mormons, her husband, Robert Hunter, went to hear the elders and became so interested that his own church held no more attraction for him and he and his wife seemed to be united religiously.

Agnes Hunter was baptized in 1847 by John Sharp, President of the Mission Branch. The next year her husband and daughter, Elizabeth, were baptized into the Church. She began planning and saving to go to Zion with her family. One of the Elders, Mr. Fife, was returning to America and the converts got the spirit of gathering but other people in the community who hated the Mormons made an effigy of Elder William Gibson and burned it in front of the Hunter home. Robert was very much insulted and embarrassed by his friends who came daily to his store. The ridicule was more than he could stand so he did not go to meeting any more, but allowed his wife and children to go to America with the thought that he would support them and come later after selling his store.

The sailing vessel North Atlantic, left Liverpool, England, Wednesday, September 4, 1850, with 357 Saints on board, among whom were Agnes Hunter and her 4 children, Margaret, Janet, Elizabeth and James, with ages ranging from 15 to 6 years. They were presided over by David Sudworth and Hamilton Q. Park while on the vessel. One of their friends, the wife of David Love, was very ill nearly all the time on the journey and Margaret Hunter cared for her two little children. They were eight weeks on the water and arrived in New Orleans, November 1, 1850.

On November 8, 1850, they arrived at St. Louis traveling up the Mississippi by steamboat, from there they went to the small mining town of Gravies, 7 miles distant. One year later, Agnes Hunter passed away of cholera. The four children watched with sad faces while the body of their mother was placed in a wagon with three others for burial and they never knew where her grave was other than the name Blue Ridge.

At this time their uncle, Adam Hunter, came from Scotland and helped the children. He told them of the serious illness of their father. He and his wife took Janet to Utah with them and took care of her until she married David S. Cook on September 24, 1852. In the meantime the wife of David Love died and he persuaded Margaret if she would marry him and take care of his little children, he would take her sister and brother to Utah. As the steam boats from St. Louis to Council Bluffs were overcrowded and unsatisfactory, David Love bought a cow to replace an ox that had died and the little group spent 8 weeks on the journey. Elizabeth was given the care of her little brother Jimmie and the cow.

In 1852, they crossed the plains and arrived in Utah, August 13, 1852. Elizabeth had walked nearly all of the way without shoes or hat and the cow had been a real problem although it gave them milk to drink. Many times when the company was preparing to move on in the mornings, they saw green feed across the river and Elizabeth would drive the cow into the stream after taking the precaution to wrap its tail around her arm to keep from being carried away by the swift current, then cold and wet, she would have to watch the cow while it ate.

When they arrived in Utah, people knew they were orphans and gave them work and what help they could. Elizabeth still had no shoes and had to go barefoot all through the winter so she determined to earn enough to buy her a pair of shoes.

She and another girl went to work for a Mr. Nicholson, where they had good food and shelter and helped with farm work. One of their special duties was to gather, clean, and sell vegetables to emigrants as they came from Emigration Canyon. One day they saw two dead oxen and determined to skin them and trade the hides to an old shoemaker for shoes. After their work was done in the evening, they secured sharp knives and went back to the hard task where they worked by moonlight. Mrs. Nicholson saw them dragging the hides back through the sagebrush and immediately took them, as she was paying the girls \$1 a week to work for her. Needless to say they shed bitter tears in their disappointment.

At another time, they found a large collection of boots and shoes where emigrants had discarded them. They again took their knives, after work, and cut away the best leather, that they might have shoes. They carried it home in their aprons. Again their employer saw them and charged them \$16 for the time they spent. This they paid for at the wage of \$1 per week. At last Elizabeth had leather which she took to the shoemaker who required her to work for him four months for his labor. But what wonderful shoes they were, and in order to save them in walking through stones or stubble, Elizabeth carried them.

She later went to Mill Creek to work, cutting beets for molasses. She stayed there three months but when the man of the house, who already had two wives wanted her to marry him, she left. In 1853 they received word of the death of their father, Robert Hunter, in Scotland. Elizabeth was now 15 years old and with two other girls went to work for Joseph S. Murdock at the Church Pasture just beyond Beck's Hot Springs. The girls milked 34 cows night and morning, and sold the milk to the men who worked at the Red Butte Sandstone quarry. June 11, 1854, Elizabeth Hunter was married to Joseph Stacy Murdock in Salt Lake City. He already had a wife but no children.

In 1856 they were called on a colonizing mission to Carson Valley, Nevada. The Mormon Battalion members, returning to Utah from California gave glowing accounts of the fertile valley of the Carson River where wild hay could be cut at will. President Brigham Young felt the importance of having a station between Salt Lake and San Francisco as a protection from Indians and a trading place where gold seekers and colonists could exchange part of their heavy loads of states goods for food for themselves and horses. The colonists were soon established. They planted their seeds and Joseph and Elizabeth bought a homestead from the Mexicans with their first crop. The pioneers kept many cows. The women made a little money by making

butter and placing it in brine, in casks or barrels, and selling it to emigrants.

In 1857 public buildings had been established and the small colony had begun to grow. Then Johnston's Army was sent to Utah. President Young called the colonists and missionaries home to defend Zion. They were told to be in Salt Lake City in three weeks. Elizabeth said, "Our crops are beautiful with food for a year, we have no strong wagons or teams, how can we go?" Joseph said, "We will be there in three weeks."

As the colonizers were all called back to Utah, there was no one to buy their land and crops. However, one morning Elizabeth was awakened very early and saw some new wagons and teams in front of their home. Joseph was soon outside investigating and found the men to be cantaloupe raisers from Texas on their way to California. They saw the fertile land with plenty of water and thought California was very near so they bought Joseph's property and also his neighbor Hunsaker's. When he came back in the house he had bought teams and new wagons and had money to care for his family until they could make a new home. At this time they settled in American Fork where they lived 4 years. On November 15, 1860, Joseph S. Murdock was ordained a bishop, under the hands of Pres. Brigham Young, and was sent to preside over the people who were located in Wasatch County, thus he was the first bishop of Heber City. While acting in that capacity he served as the first representative of the county in the territorial legislature.

In 1867 Joseph and Elizabeth with about fifty other families were called to colonize in Southern Nevada, on the Muddy about 100 miles west of St. George, to help settle Dixie and to raise cotton.

At one time, when their father was away, the boys were sent to break up some land some distance from home. Their plows and harness broke as the land was hard and untillable. After several days they decided to go home to their mother. Neighbors were few and far between, but that night when they reached the home of their mother's best friend they persuaded her to go home with them. This was truly an answer to Elizabeth's prayer for that night a son was born to her and she would have otherwise been alone.

It was a great trial to Elizabeth to be forced to feed her family on all very coarse food, and one night as she mixed the bran bread, she could not keep back the tears that fell into the mixing pan. It was a bright moonlight night and when she went outside, heaven seemed very near so she prayed earnestly that they might get better food. At 3 a.m. a wagon stopped and a man came to the door asking to buy hay and grain for his teams. Because of the heat and hearing Joseph had the feed he needed, he had driven in the night. After he had secured what he wanted, Joseph said to him, "It seems like you are loaded very heavy for these sandy roads, what are you hauling?" The man answered "White flour and you can have all you want for what it cost me." So Joseph and Elizabeth were soon stacking bags of flour in their little home, and the next morning they and their friends around had real biscuits for breakfast. Elizabeth's prayer was answered.

It was practically a desert and a very hard place to colonize in comparison to Carson Valley. Cotton could be raised, also lucern and other sturdy crops. The land, first thought to be in Utah, became

part of Nevada and people were doubly taxed. Finally Arizona, too, put in claims and the poverty of the people made it impossible to remain longer than 1870, when they were given permission to move elsewhere.

When they finally left the old home on "The Muddy," Elizabeth looked back and could see smoke arising. Alva, the son born in Carson, Nevada, admitted he had lighted the match so they could not go back and "could go where there were schools and people, and his mother would not have to work so hard."

In 1870 Joseph and Elizabeth and their boys returned to Heber City. On the way they stopped in Provo where Joseph secured a mail contract for the boys to carry U. S. Mail from Provo to Echo and return. In the family there was now five wives and many children to be fed, clothed and housed.

The first year in Heber they had no flour; having only chopped wheat ground through the coffee mill, and later through a hopper which was brought into the valley. Syrup made from boiling beets was all they had for cooking and sugar. Elizabeth relates that one year a sort of mist, or grains of sweet sap, formed upon the cottonwood trees along the river bottom and that many spread sheets upon the ground and shook the grains upon them. Later they melted and strained it -- to remove ants and sticks. It had the appearance of light brown sugar when it hardened -- this was found only one year along the banks of the Provo River.

Elizabeth was now a leader in Relief Society, helping other women to make good with what they had to use. She was always an inspiration to her family. She was always kind and cheerful and never complained. When her children and grandchildren visited her they took flowers, fruit and other gifts, but always went away feeling she had given them intangible gifts that they could use constantly, to make their lives better. Her motto was, "It pays to be good."

When she was 89 years old, she had the misfortune to fall and break her hip. She used crutches for some time. She lived with her daughter Annie Coleman at the time, and her sons would often call and take her for a ride. Annie said she was like a naughty little girl as she would "ditch" her crutches inside the gate until she came back.

In the later years of Elizabeth's life, every day was open house in the home of her daughter. Every morning she had a clean white apron, always trimmed in hand-made lace. One drawer in her old mahogany bureau was filled with those lovely aprons -- the gifts and handwork of many of her friends. She had a keen sense of humor and her friends and relatives all loved to visit her. Her posterity ranks among leaders in education, religion, and commercial fields in the inter-mountain country. Her intellect was keen up to the last day in her 96 years, and she was cheerful and happy.

Elizabeth was the mother of eleven children. She had 88 grandchildren, 102 great-grandchildren, and 27 great-great-grandchildren when she died.